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Guidance does not require mandatory reporting of underage sex

Health professionals will not have to report teenagers who are having underage sex to the police, says guidance for England on child protection published this week. The guidance advises that decisions on referral to child protection agencies should be considered on a case by case basis.

The guidance was developed by the UK Department for Education and Skills to update previous recommendations after a series of child abuse cases and changes in legislation and policy.

It included a review of the Bichard inquiry, carried out after the murder of two schoolgirls by Ian Huntley, a school caretaker with a history of sex with underage girls. The inquiry report recommended that police should be informed whenever someone aged under 16 was having sex with an older partner. But health professionals were concerned that young people might not consult for medical advice, including contraception, if they thought they would be reported to the police (*BMJ* 2005;331:918-9).

The new guidance recommends that professionals working with children should decide on a case by case basis whether or not to report any child who is having sex.

Susan Mayor London

Working Together to Safeguard Children is available at www.everychildmatters.gov.uk.

Killer tries to stop publication of inquiry into his care

Michael Stone, the former psychiatric patient convicted of the murders of Lin and Megan Russell in Kent in 1996, is mounting an unprecedented legal challenge to try to stop publication of a report into his care before the killings.

In 1994 he was sectioned under the Mental Health Act, but doctors decided he was not



AP/WIDEWORLD

EU warns four countries over tobacco advertising

The European Commission has stepped up its campaign against tobacco advertising by threatening to take four EU countries to court for not fully respecting the Europe-wide ban, which came into force last summer. Italy, Spain, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were sent formal warnings this week and told to comply with the new restrictions.

The four countries now have two months to fully implement the legislation. Any country that fails to do so will be taken to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. In each case, the government made its own exemptions by granting special status to key sporting events, such as Formula One motor racing (pictured above).

Under an earlier ban on tobacco advertising proposed by the European Union, the United Kingdom had argued for, and won, an exemption for Formula One racing. But when the legislation was revised in 2003, no exemptions were allowed. The only events which may attract tobacco sponsorship are purely local sports events that have no international television, radio, or newspaper coverage.

Rory Watson Brussels

mentally ill and released him. In 1996 Lin Russell and her 6 year old daughter, Megan, were murdered by Mr Stone as they walked home from a swimming gala along a country lane in Chillenden, Kent. Megan's elder sister, Josie, then aged 9, survived the attack.

Robert Francis QC headed a team commissioned to carry out an inquiry into Mr Stone's dealings with the NHS, social services, and the probation service after he was convicted in 1998. The report was delivered in 2000, but publication was held up while Mr Stone appealed against his conviction, was retried, and appealed twice against his second conviction. He lost his second appeal in 2005.

In England and Wales an independent inquiry is mandatory into any homicide by someone who has had recent

psychiatric care. Mr Stone's challenge to publication of the report will be heard in the High Court in June. He argues that his right to respect for his private life under article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and his rights under the Data Protection Act would be infringed if the report was published.

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

Nine drug company chiefs are charged with conspiracy to defraud NHS

Nine British pharmaceutical executives have been charged with conspiracy to defraud the NHS, after an investigation by

the Serious Fraud Office into price fixing of generic drugs.

Five companies have also been charged with colluding to keep prices high: Goldshield Group, Kent Pharmaceuticals, Norton Healthcare, Generics (UK), and Ranbaxy (UK). All the companies and individuals charged deny wrongdoing.

The Serious Fraud Office's inquiry, dubbed Operation Holbein, is one of its biggest ever cases, involving up to 150 investigators. Officers raided six companies in 2002. One, Regent-GM Laboratories, has since been wound up. The other five are those charged last week.

The criminal charges relate to alleged price fixing between 1996 and 2000. It is believed that investigators secured the cooperation of a whistleblower—a former marketing manager at Regent-GM—who attended meetings where manufacturers of generic drugs are alleged to have colluded to restrict supplies.

The drugs involved in the alleged price fixing scheme include warfarin and several penicillin based antibiotics.

Owen Dyer London

Uganda sees a rise of 12% in TB cases

The number of tuberculosis cases is on the rise in Uganda. The health ministry has seen an increase of almost 12% between 2001 and 2005, with cases increasing from 37 600 to 42 000.

Doctors and public health officials are turning to community based health care as the most cost effective means to contain the disease, because hospital services are thinly spread and ill equipped.

The increase in tuberculosis infections is blamed on several causes, including the prevalence of HIV and AIDS, the country's poor health infrastructure and hospital coverage, a lack of awareness of the disease among the public, and poor sanitation in the slum areas of urban centres, where most cases have been recorded.

Henry Wasswa Kampala